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This May is Mental Health Month

***Life With a Mental Illness* Theme Highlights Importance of Speaking Up, Sharing
What #mentalillnessfeelslike**

Contact: Desiree Alarcon, 916-557-1167 ext. 101, dalarcon@mhac.org

Sacramento, CA (April 29, 2016) -When mental illness is discussed, the language typically used to describe it tends to be clinical and impersonal. These words, often don't do justice to what life with a mental illness feels like. That is why our theme this year for May is Mental Health Month is *Life With a Mental Illness*. It is a call to action to share what life with a mental illness feels like to people living with challenges.

May is Mental Health Month was started 67 years ago by Mental Health America of California's national organization, Mental Health America, to raise awareness about mental health conditions and the importance of good mental health for everyone.

Last year's theme featured our B4Stage4initiative. What is B4Stage4?If we are faced with cancer, heart disease, or diabetes, we don't wait years to treat them. We start long before Stage 4. We begin with prevention and when people are in the first stage of those diseases, and have a persistent cough, high blood pressure, or high blood sugar, we try immediately to reverse these symptoms. This is what we should be doing when people are living with mental health challenges. When people first begin to experience symptoms such as loss of sleep, feeling tired for no reason, feeling low, feeling anxious, or hearing voices, we should act.

This year, we are building off of the B4Stage4 message and encouraging individuals to give voice to what it really means to live at stages 1, 2, 3, and 4 of mental illness. The project is meant to help support people that choose to share their story. Sharing lived experience of mental health challenges is one of the best ways to encourage others to address their own challenges.

"Mental illness is preventable and recovery is achievable. Help is available. We must focus on prevention and early intervention, before Stage 4, before crisis" said Zima Creason, CEO, Mental Health America of California.

"Sharing our stories of mental health challenges is key to breaking down the stigma surrounding mental illnesses and to show others that they are not alone in their feelings and their symptoms."

This Mental Health Month, we are encouraging people to speak up about how it feels to live with mental health challenges by tagging social media posts with *#mentalillnessfeelslike*. Posting with our hashtag is a way to speak up, to share your point of view with people who may be struggling to explain what they are going through-and help others figure out if they too are showing signs of a mental illness.

MHA has also developed a series of fact sheets available on its website (www.mentalhealthamerica.net/may) on realizing the critical importance of addressing mental health early, recognizing the risk factors and signs of mental illness, understanding what mental illness is and isn't, and how and where to get help when needed.

Research shows that by ignoring symptoms, we lose ten years in which we could intervene in order to change people's lives for the better. Speaking out about what mental illness feels like can encourage others to recognize symptoms early on and empower individuals to be agents in their own recovery.

"Prevention, early intervention and integrated services work," concluded Ms. Creason. "Reach out if you need help and be supportive to those around you with challenges."

For more information on May is Mental Health Month, visit Mental Health America's website at www.mentalhealthamerica.net/may. For more information about Mental Health America of California, visit www.mhac.org.

The mission of Mental Health America of California is to ensure that people of all ages, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, etc. who require mental health services and supports are able to live full and productive lives, receive the mental health services and other services that they need, and are not denied any other benefits, services, rights, or opportunities based on their need for mental health services. Through advocacy and education we strive to achieve these goals. Our organization and affiliates provide a conduit through which statewide coalitions on mental health are maintained and work together to promote these values.

**Help Make a Difference
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